

City of New Haven, Community Services Administration,

Nurturing Families Network

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

My name is Dr. Chisara N. Asomugha. Thank you for the opportunity to provide public testimony regarding the proposal to eliminate non-hospital based Nurturing Families Network (NFN) programs and reduce hospital-based NFN programs by 30%. I am a pediatrician and health services researcher in the area of child abuse and neglect, and am the Community Services Administrator and Acting Director of Health for the City of New Haven. I am here to express my strongest support for maintaining this critical family health programs and to highlight the significant negative impact the proposal to cut these programs will have on the safety net provided for our most vulnerable families.

In 2007, New Haven became the second city in Connecticut to successfully go to scale within the NFN program and now has eight sites. Serving hundreds of families annually, our strong network of community-based sites has provided a coordinated prevention model to educate and serve families at highest risk for abuse and neglect leading to lower incidence of child abuse reports, stronger families and stable neighborhoods. Nevertheless, under the proposed mitigation plan, the City of New Haven would lose five (5) of its sites. This nearly 65% decrease in the number of sites in New Haven will have immediate and long-lasting effects. First, there will be loss of jobs for the hardworking staff of NFN. The increased unemployment rate and the cost of state support will lead to higher human and financial costs—not savings—for the State. Secondly, high-risk families will lose the support needed to ensure the integrity of the family unit. These families are at great risk of having substantiated claims of child abuse and neglect without this supportive program. Therefore, NFN's absence will lead to a reversal in the rate of child abuse and neglect cases, an increase number of disrupted families and higher caseloads for DSS staff. The long-term consequences—

inadequate workforce, long-term mental health issues, homelessness, increased poverty rates—would devastate our communities. Third, there would be significant infringement on the critical relationships developed between families served and the highly-skilled culturally sensitive staff involved in the NFN. Our community-based NFN home-visitors are intimately familiar with the populations they serve, allowing mutual trust to foster positive outcomes. Removing this familiarity will weaken the bonds necessary to support healthy families and communities. Ultimately, the elimination of NFN would be an incredible disservice and breach in the State's commitment to families in Connecticut.

The evidence supporting NFN is substantial. Research out of the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research has shown that families participating in the Nurturing Families Network have far lower rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect compared to families who did not participate in NFN and that NFN parents are more likely to complete high school, obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient—three factors that significantly impact the health and well-being of individuals and communities. More specifically, almost two-thirds of NFN mothers completed high school after two years in the home visiting program (an increase from about half at entry), and the proportion of mothers employed almost doubled, to about 50%. Fathers' rates of high school completion also rose to about the same level as the mothers, and the proportion of fathers employed full-time rose dramatically, from 15% at entry into the program to 38% two years later. Having educated employed heads of households increases our taxpayer base, improves the quality of life for families and supports a stable community. In addition, the Children's Trust Fund has documented that this unique home visiting service (including the more recent and innovative Fatherhood Initiative) is cost-effective, saving the State of Connecticut millions of dollars a year in direct and indirect costs.

The Nurturing Families Networks is an integral component of Connecticut's care coordination and home visiting service delivery system for high-risk families and offers a successful vehicle

for mitigating present and future risks and costs to the cities of this State. It exemplifies the advantage of implementing evidenced-based programming to address the significant social issues of our time. The state of Connecticut must reconsider the proposal to cut NFN programs and prioritize the lives of children and families and the future of this State. As Churchill said, "If not now, then when? If not us, then who?" We have an opportunity right now to ensure the present and future stability of the children and families in Connecticut. So, I urge the Appropriations Committee to reject these drastic cuts and to fund Nurturing Families Network programs and keep the NFN program intact. The lives of our children and the future of this great State depend on it.

Thank you very much for your attention and consideration.

